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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [NI](#) [ELECTIONS](#)

SUBJECT: 2007 PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE BUBA MARWA

Classified By: Ambassador John Campbell for Reasons 1.5 (B & D).

1. (C) Ambassador lunched August 29 with retired Brigadier General Buba Marwa, an announced candidate for president in 2007 whose posters already adorn Abuja and other cities. Marwa is quite confident of winning in 2007, believing that two of his three main potential rivals will not enter the race and that he has support in each of the six Nigerian political zones. He asked for the meeting, brought his wife and three aides to the luncheon, and used the occasion to both sound out the American Embassy and make his case why he would be good for the U.S. as Nigeria's President from 2007.

2. (C) Marwa's case boiled down to three points: first that he was close to the U.S. and had lived there for ten years; second that the experience had turned him into an American-style problem solver; and third that he would win the election. Marwa noted that he had served in the U.S. as a soldier and as a diplomat in Massachusetts, Kansas, Kentucky, Pittsburgh, Washington and New York, the latter two in Nigeria's Missions to the U.S. and UN. He remarked upon his graduate degree from Harvard, saying the experience made him approach issues with an American sense of solving problems instead of letting them slide as some Nigerian leaders did. It was as close as he came to criticizing a President Obasanjo who is widely regarded, including by Marwa, as close to the USG. Marwa claimed he had plans, not elaborated, for solving Nigeria's problems in the Delta and in the north.

ELECTION DYNAMICS

3. (C) Marwa told of winning support across Nigeria through his experience (a northern Muslim governor of Lagos in the south during military rule) and his foundation's largess. In addition to funding a chair at Kansas University, Marwa's foundation has long funded scholarships for students across Nigeria at the secondary and college level. These made him an especially potent force among younger Nigerians, and youth groups were a mainspring of support in areas where he would have no ethnic/religious ties. The youth wing of the Igbo communal organization Ohnaeze, for example, had pledged its support and would bring the Igbo to his cause even if there was an Igbo running for one of the minority parties against him. He claimed even more open support in the South-South region than in the Southeast, benefiting there too from demographics of a growing youth-voter population.

4. (C) Marwa treated support in Lagos and the Southwest as a given, and travels there often. Although he did not remark upon "zoning the next presidency to the North," he spent most of his analysis to the Ambassador and Political Counselor on his northern rivals. He believed former head of state Ibrahim Babangida would probably not run, shying away in the end from a candidature into a king-maker role. 2003 ANPP candidate Muhammadu Buhari probably would not run either, Marwa thought, but Buhari would work hard to deny the Northwest to Babangida.

5. (C/NF) VP Atiku would run, Marwa believed, but would lose to Marwa's appeal and Obasanjo's ill will. Marwa claimed Atiku had huge financial resources, much more than Marwa. (Comment: Marwa is widely thought to be running on money looted from GON coffers by deceased military head of state Sani Abacha and his associates, and it was unclear whether Marwa meant Atiku had larger personal resources or had larger resources including the GON.) Marwa believed that Obasanjo's ill will toward his VP would cause the ruling PDP to dissolve into factions, and that many would come to his standard. He was, he said, the only one all Nigerians could rally behind.

COMMENT

6. (C/NF) Marwa is widely viewed within the political elite as the stalking horse for Babangida, who, as he points out, will likely shy away from a run at the Presidency. Marwa derives more than a small measure of his support from Babangida in addition to his own resources from the Abacha regime. His glowing assessment of his own popularity suffers from the usual Nigerian habit of self-promotion and his

support, especially outside Borno and Lagos states, is directly dependent on his finances. While he is probably not nearly as popular as he believes in either the South-South or the Southeast, he has the potential to become an important candidate as 2007 approaches.

CAMPBELL